

Journal of Applied Christian Leadership

Volume 11 | Number 1

Article 10

3-2017

A Passion for Leadership: Lessons on Change and Reform From Fifty Years of Public Service

Joel L. Honore

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Honore, Joel L. (2017) "A Passion for Leadership: Lessons on Change and Reform From Fifty Years of Public Service," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 11: No. 1, 101-103.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol11/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Applied Christian Leadership by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

working with people where they are; understanding the ethnic diversity within a congregation; mediating low and high powered distance groups and managing an all-volunteer community.

Creating a church that develops leaders is a necessity if we are to bring to life the mandate Christ gave to all His followers as part of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. If we are not intentional in this duty, Geiger and Peck gives the reader a sobering thought: “Should we fail to lead as God has designed, we beckon disaster to enter into our world. Should we develop leaders apart from God’s design, we actually help propagate destruction and misery rather than life and hope” (loc 1028).

With such statements and challenges, *Designed to Lead* is one of the few church leadership books that creates a sense of urgency in the reader to do God’s work and create disciples and future leaders for Christ. The shortcomings in the material do not overshadow the book’s overall value. One of the greatest strengths of *Designed to Lead* is the novel and easy to grasp concept of the three C’s and the inclusion of different diagnostic tools that, while basic, provide a solid starting point for understanding change management and leader development within the church. Any pastor or church leader struggling with change or seeking to create an effective leadership program will find this book a useful primer for their library.

SHAWN ELLIS is a student in the Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry at Andrews University. As a former business consultant, he is passionate about leadership and organizational structure.

A PASSION FOR LEADERSHIP: LESSONS ON CHANGE AND REFORM FROM FIFTY YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE (FIRST EDITION)

By Robert M. Gates
New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf. (2016)
Hardcover, 239 pages

Reviewed by JOEL L. HONORÉ

Robert M. Gates began his government service in 1966 with the Central Intelligence Agency. A year later he was commissioned Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force. He served nine years at the National Security Council. From 1986 to 1989 he was Deputy Director of Central Intelligence, followed by his role as Deputy National Security Advisor and Assistant to the President from 1989 to 1991. That year, he became Director of National Intelligence until 1993. In 1993, Gates turned his focus to academia. He served as the interim dean of the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University from 1999 to 2001 before becoming the university president. In 2006, he was called back into government work to serve as the Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush. In 2011, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom on his last day in office by President Barack Obama. His other books include *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (2015), and *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider’s Story of Five Presidents and How they Won the Cold War* (2007).

In this book, Robert Gates sets out to inspire young people considering public service as a career. He seeks to provide them the tools and attributes needed for

effecting change in the bureaucratic world of government. His opinion is that bureaucracies are failing systems, and he seeks to build a case for their reform.

Gates sees government as short on efficiency, innovation and change. He argues that much of government does not work very well and all bureaucracies need to be reformed. He lists a number of obstacles to bureaucratic reforms such as: political interests, the uneven quality of people filling leadership roles, the lack of managerial or leadership experience, job security for some, job uncertainty for directors, demands for transparency, risk avoidance, insular thinking, and the lack of economic incentives (pp. 9–18). Yet, he believes “that with the right strategies and the right skills leaders can—whatever direction politics takes us—reform and change these institutions” (p.21).

Gates’ solution to inefficient bureaucracies begins with having a vision for one’s work. This is attained by listening to every level of the organization. Listening is an assessment needed early in one’s leadership assignment. After getting clarity on the immediate reality, the leader must formulate a compelling vision. According to Gates, a worthwhile vision needs to be coupled with “political skill and the administrative mind” (p. 25). He posits that external challenges must be factored into the vision formulation. Leaders must also prioritize their agenda items. “All leaders will have to decide the relative importance of urgent problems versus long-term challenges. . . (p. 37). Some decisions leaders will have to engage in alone. A clearly defined and achievable vision and the right set of priorities are the essentials to start the change process in an entrenched bureaucracy.

Gates goes on to encourage the formulation of strategies by familiarizing oneself with the various constituencies affected by, or affecting, one’s role. The support of the ground level people is

vitaly important. He advises leaders to clarify priorities in order to decide which functions to delegate and which to personally handle. Strategies must be designed with the political considerations of one’s specific bureaucracy. A clear communication of the change plan is needed to make things happen.

He addresses the topic of strategic implementation by calling for participation from different parts of the organization. Gates proposes for transparency regarding organizational transformation, internally and externally. He further pushes that at some point a leader has to decide to proceed without further analysis. Implementation deadlines are crucial if one is to effect change. “‘Micro-knowledge’ is necessary; micromanagement is not” (p. 91). According to Gates, successful implementation calls for follow through and follow-up.

The human dimension of organizations is central. Gates points out that “People, not systems, implement an agenda for change” (p. 98). Everyone, he offers, needs validation. It is the leader’s responsibility to provide it. Employees are benefited when their work is considered important. By contrast he warns that leaders should be careful to not criticize their subordinates publicly. Rather, effective leaders know that every employee should be treated with respect and dignity (p. 104).

Successful reforms are achieved through empowered subordinates. Effective leaders give credit to those around them, and help advance high performers. Gates points out that, “Candor is critical to a leader’s success. Every boss needs to understand that creating a climate where people feel comfortable in being honest in their opinions is the cheapest possible job insurance for the person in charge” (p. 118).

Gates says that smart leaders are not led by their egos. They operate with integrity. Their characters are consistent regardless of context. They are self-disci-

plined people. Leaders who convey a sense of intellectual or professional superiority deprive themselves of the benefit of those around them. He offers that reformers are courageous. He advocates for using a team of trustworthy, inner circle leaders committed to the change agenda.

Speaking from experience, Gates points out that leaders seldom get everything they want. Compromise comes with the territory. For him, good leadership calls for adjustments and flexibility. He admonishes reforming leaders to take their work seriously, but not themselves. He adds, a good leader knows when to leave.

A useful point that Gates addresses is the fact that financial challenges pose excellent opportunities for change and reform. Often, those are the best opportunities that a leader has to engage in real transformation. He warns, however, that when reducing staff is necessary, the manner in which it is done is important. Financial transparency is significant in maintaining trust. And, across the board cuts are seldom useful.

Gates reminds the reader that leaders power reforms. It's the leader's job to identify what's not working and initiate corrective steps. Leaders who properly identify and champion the core positive elements of organizational culture will experience less resistance when they tackle peripheral issues.

In closing he points out that, "The agent of change in bureaucracies should regard reform—institutional transformation—as a marathon, not a sprint" (p. 216).

Gates' solution for reforming bureaucracies is to have a good vision, formulate a strategy and implement the changes. He points out the need to be mindful of people, stakeholders, and one's own ego. He advises capitalizing on financial crisis as well as viewing reform as a never-ending process. In his final chapter, he appeals to the reader's passion for a better future.

Though Gates is an academic, this book is not. It is written for the general population in common terms. While he provides useful leadership principles, they are drowned with anecdotes from his work experience. This half biography, half leadership text makes for easy reading. However, it is not advisable for academic use as it lacks academic rigor and empirical data.

JOEL L. HONORÉ pastors the Stone Mountain Seventh-day Adventist Church in Stone Mountain, Georgia, and is a doctoral candidate at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

WOMEN IN THE SHADOWS: AN ETHICAL VIEW OF PASTORAL WIVES ENGAGED IN MINISTRY

By Renee McKey

*Berrien Springs, MI: Logos Library
Seventh-day Adventist Theological
Seminary (2015)*

E-book, 151 pages

Reviewed by RICHARD S. KURTZ

The premise of this e-book appeared to be two-fold. First, it presented the value of pastors' wives regarding the roles they fulfill in the ministry of the church alongside their spouses. The author then addressed the issue of women's ordination in the SDA administrative hierarchy. Both of these issues are of vital importance, especially regarding the current battle to honor the importance of women in the SDA church. The book fairly presented the case that both of these issues appeared to be interconnected.

The author presented her own personal struggles regarding being a pastor's wife, and the importance of her role to the church, but not really hav-